

**Manchester Public Library Advisory Board's 21st Century Public Library Task Force**  
**Special Meeting Minutes - Survey Workgroup (Byroade/Doucette/Odell/Ristau)**

**April 21, 2021**

*Library Advisory Board members:* Miriam Byroade, Ashley Odell

Not present: Heather Doucette

*21st Century Library Task Force members:* Stephen Ristau

Special meeting called to order at 3:02 PM.

*Objective of special meeting*

While larger committee meetings have focused on ideas for outreach, there is a need to develop a more organized overall framework for community engagement, starting with our surveys. Smaller workgroups can help generate ideas to propose to the larger group.

This group should consider how to tell the wider community our story -- why we exist, what we're trying to accomplish, and what our process is, beyond the text of the Board of Directors' resolution. The task force is the foundation of the overall library initiative's formal process and needs to inform the community that that process has started. Our suggestions to the BOD will not be determinative of ultimate outcome, and will instead be the first chapter.

*Staff survey*

The staff survey was productive and well-received. The final list of suggested spaces and features will be a foundational part of our community survey, but it needs to be pared down and prioritized, sooner rather than later. Our work group will propose a final list for the public.

*Broader engagement strategy*

It is time to start filling in the public regarding our work. The YourVoiceMatters website is an ideal initial platform, so we need to start compiling materials to release, pending approval from town communications staff. A timeline history of past attempts at creating a modern library is important -- this began many years ago, with many community members invested, and we need to tell that story. We need to help the broader community understand that a modern library is a popular, bipartisan, cross-demographic proposal in town, not just one committee's idea. Meeting minutes, newspaper articles, letters to the Board of Directors, and other materials will help and can be shared on the YVM website. This will also help educate newer members of the

BOD who may not be aware of the issue's long history. We need to continue our outreach to them, including through tours prior to our September report so that they can be fully informed.

We need to keep the YVM project page "fresh" once it's live. Since it is a platform for both receiving and sharing information, we want to have regular content from community members describing what the library means to them and their lives. These posts can highlight the diverse ways that all communities in town engage with the library. The "OurParks" video is an example of how to educate the community; a library history video and a library tour video could be done. We should also add as many documents as possible, including past studies.

We cannot focus solely on parking, but also need to be mindful that it is the key issue for so many people. The parking issue can be a gateway to advocacy, but it's on us to present a proposal that is attractive even aside from that issue. Many of the features and spaces we'll propose will require education of both the BOD and the wider community -- we need to explain makerspaces, materials handling systems, library cafés, etc. With people being used to our library, they are not always aware of how far behind it is or how common these sorts of services are in modern libraries. We need to emphasize that not only is nothing we're proposing radical, it's expected. We need to preemptively correct misconceptions; a FAQ section on the YVM website can help with that.

We need to ask the "what" and "why" about our communication strategy, not just "how." What is it we really need to know, and why? What is the intended purpose when we receive responses from people? What will we do with that information? Our task force's objective is to report back to the BOD, so our questions should be resulting in data and concrete suggestions that 1) help formulate an overall proposal and 2) provide factual support for why we're proposing individual items. Questions that don't accomplish that goal should not be our focus.

Let's not reinvent any wheels. We have a lot of statistical data already from the library's annual reports to the Connecticut State Library and from internal tracking (e.g., program attendance). Let's also be careful with data interpretation -- half of "no" voters in 2012 were "soft no" voters, many of whom felt that proposal didn't go far enough.

We need to be intentional with our phrasing. "If we offered [example service or space], would you use it?" is a better question than "Is not having [example service or space] a barrier for you?" The former gives us a better picture, and also better data, than the latter. We need to set aside programmatic suggestions and focus on our charge -- the physical space. Small group work like this will help us move faster and get surveys finalized and ready for the community.

Special meeting adjourned at 4:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Odell